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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [BA](#) [REGION](#) [OFFICIALS](#)  
SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER AND CNO PANEL COVER REGIONAL  
ISSUES

REF: A. MANAMA 0044  
[1](#)B. MANAMA 0024

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) CNO Executive Panel co-chairs Dr. Dov Zakheim and Dr. Kiron Skinner met January 9 with Minister of Defense GEN Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa for a discussion of regional issues, including Hizballah, Iran, India, and Bahrain's defenses. Dr. Zakheim described the mission of the CNO Executive Panel, saying it was a forum for considering issues in a more complete way on behalf of the Chief of Naval Operations. From this perspective, Dr. Zakheim asked Shaikh Khalifa his view of the impact of the Israel-Hizballah war on the region. Shaikh Khalifa replied that when certain problems are ignored, they grow, and this was the case with Hizballah. Iran has close relations with Hizballah and assisted in the group's development of dangerous military capabilities. Bahrain opposes Hizballah, and he emphasized there should not be a state within a state. The international community should help the Lebanese government and Lebanese Armed Forces grow stronger.

[1](#)2. (C) Iran, the Minister continued, is doing well in Lebanon and Iraq and is trying to exert its influence around the region. President Ahmadi-Nejad just a few days earlier had threatened regional countries hosting U.S. forces. "We don't care what Iran says," Shaikh Khalifa stated, "there are no problems between the United States and Bahrain." The way to deal with Iran, he said, is to keep it busy with domestic politics. Iran interferes in the domestic politics of Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain, "and we should do the same to them." A significant percentage of Iran's citizens are not Persians, and many people are sick of the system there. Bahrain, he said, is proud to be participating with the U.S. in regional combined naval task forces, regardless of Iran's warning.

[1](#)3. (C) Asked about India's role in the region, Shaikh Khalifa said that Bahrain has good relations with India. However, India has some ambitions and strong military forces and could become a threat in the future. He noted that India and Iran have a defense agreement and there is some activity between the two countries under this agreement.

[1](#)4. (C) Turning to Bahrain's defenses, the Minister said Bahrain had been hit by missiles during the first Gulf War and still has no ability to defend itself against missiles. He recognized that steps had been taken to integrate Bahrain into the regional air defense picture, but said that Bahrain wants to be able to react to, not just see, missiles. He noted that the GCC countries signed a defense agreement a few years earlier and they are looking to improve cooperation in command-and-control and other areas.

15. (C) In response to Dr. Skinner's question, Shaikh Khalifa said there is no big terrorism problem in Bahrain. There may be some sleeper cells but he felt they did not represent a threat to Bahrain or its friends. He stated that Bahrain's intelligence system and counter-terrorism units, with U.S. help, were sufficient to handle potential threats.

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